

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 963

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 8140

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV PINT CI PFOR

SUBJECT: CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS DETERIORATE SHARPLY

REF: A) SANTIAGO 8026, B) SANTIAGO 8028

1. SUMMARY: CATHOLIC CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS HAVE FALLEN PROBABLY TO THEIR LOWEST LEVEL SINCE THE 1973 COUP. THE CHURCH REACTED STRONGLY TO DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST THREE BISHOPS RETURNING FROM ECUADOR AUGUST 15, WHICH IT ATTRIBUTED TO MID-LEVEL GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONARIES. FRUSTRATED AT THEIR INABILITY TO INFLUENCE GOC POLICIES, AND PROBABLY CATALYZED BY THE AFFRONT TO THEIR PERSONS, CHURCH LEADERS THEN LASHED OUT MORE DIRECTLY AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT FOR HAVING EXPELLED LAWYERS VELASCO AND CASTILLO, AND AGAINST THE CRITICAL CONSERVATIVE ESTABLISHMENT AS PERSONIFIED BY AUTHORITATIVE DAILY "EL MERCURIO." THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS PLACATORY IN ITS DESIRE TO AVOID CONFRONTATION. END SUMMARY.

2. CHURCH CRITICISMS: IN THE SHARPEST CRITICISM OF GOC AUTHORITY SINCE THE COUP -- TRANSCENDING THE CHURCH'S APRIL 1974 CONDEMNATION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES (74 SANTIAGO 2212) -- THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE OF THE CATHOLIC EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE FOLLOWED UP ITS AUGUST 17 STATEMENT
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(REF B) WITH A SIMILARLY STRONG STATEMENT THE NEXT DAY:
IT BLASTED THE GOC EXPULSION OF LAWYERS CASTILLO AND VELASCO AND ACCUSED THE GOVERNMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES WHICH CREATE A "MORAL PROBLEM," ON WHICH THE CHURCH COULD NOT BE SILENT.

3. THIS SECOND STATEMENT ASSERTS THAT THE GOC'S REFUSAL TO DEFINE CLEARLY THE GROUNDS FOR EXPULSION "IS UNACCEPTABLE AND CLOSES THE ROAD TO ALL RECONCILIATION." THE STATEMENT ENDS WITH A CALL TO THE ALMIGHTY TO "ENLIGHTEN OUR GOVERNORS TO ENABLE THEM TO AID US IN FINDING THE ROAD TO ... RECONCILIATION AND PEACE."

4. THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE'S AUGUST 17 STATEMENT (REF B) WAS READ TO THE PRESS BY COMMITTEE PRESIDENT ARCHBISHOP JUAN FRANCISCO FRESNO OF LA SERENA. HE HAD BEEN CHOSEN FOR THE PRESIDENCY LAST YEAR AS A TRADITIONALLY CONSERVATIVE LEADER FAVORABLY DISPOSED TOWARD THE GOC. HIS IDENTIFICATION WITH THE STATEMENT THUS UNDERLINED THE UNANIMITY OF FEELING AMONG THE SENIOR BISHOPS. HE WAS FOLLOWED BY THE THREE BISHOPS WHO HAD ATTENDED THE RIOBAMBA MEETING IN ECUADOR (REF A). THEY ADDRESSED LENGTH THEIR ECUADORIAN EXPERIENCE AND THE AIRPORT DEMONSTRATION AT THEIR RETURN. MOST TELLING WAS BISHOP CARLOS GONZALEZ -- ALSO A MEMBER OF THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE -- WHO "REGRETTED THE WEAKENED OR DETERIORATED" CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS. HE SAID THE FAULT DID NOT LIE WITH THE CHURCH OR WITH PRESIDENT PINOCHET ("AN HONEST, SERIOUS MAN"), BUT RATHER WITH "INTERMEDIARIES" OR MIDDLE LEVEL PEOPLE WHO SEEK TO CREATE TENSION BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE GOC.

5. BISHOP GONZALEZ CLARIFIED THE INTENT OF THE "AUTOMATIC EXCOMMUNICATION" METED OUT TO PROMOTERS AND INSTIGATORS OF THE AIRPORT DEMONSTRATION (PARA FOUR, REF B). THE EXCOMMUNICATION EXTENDED TO THOSE RESPONSIBLE AS THEIR CONSCIENCE DICTATED. TO MAKE CLEAR THE COMMITTEE'S BELIEF THAT GOC PERSONNEL ORGANIZED THE DEMONSTRATION, BISHOP GONZALEZ NAMED AS EXCOMMUNICANT ONE MANUEL CABRERA COSTA (INDICATING ALSO HIS OFFICE NUMBER IN THE MAIN GOC BUILDING -- THE NUMBER OF THE SUITE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CIVIL ORGANIZATIONS) FOR HIS PART IN DIRECTING THE DISORDER. HE ALSO SINGLED OUT THREE YOUTHS WHO HAD ATTEMPTED TO ARREST

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HIM, ATTACKED HIS DRIVER IN THE PROCESS, AND IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES AS AGENTS OF THE NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE (DINA).

6. THE CHURCH TOOK A THIRD PUBLIC STEP BY FOLLOWING UP ON ITS CRITICISM OF RECENT COMMENTARY BY THE GOC-CONTROLLED MEDIA (REF A). IN A LETTER TO "EL MERCURIO" AUGUST 17 THE THREE BISHOPS WHO HAD BEEN IN ECUADOR LABELLED AS "SHAMEFUL" A MERCURIO EDITORIAL SUGGESTING THAT THE BISHOPS ABSOLVE THEMSELVES OF WRONGDOING IN RIOBAMBA. THEY SEIZED ON THE DITORIAL'S COMMENT THAT "A TOTALITARIAN HAND" HAD BEEN PRESENT IN THE PUDAHUEL DISORDER -- INFERRING COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION -- AND TURNED IT AGAINST

THE GOVERNMENT: THE PROBLEM WAS KNOWING "TO WHOM THE HAND BELONGED."

7. PINOCHET DUCKS: PRESIDENT PINOCHET HAS APPARENTLY TRIED TO PLAY DOWN THE EVENTS. ON AUGUST 17 HE REACTED TO THE PUDAHUEL INCIDENT BY SAYING THAT IT HAD NOT ADVERSELY AFFECTED THE GOC'S RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH. HE DENIED THAT INTELLIGENCE AGENTS HAD PARTICIPATED AS DEMONSTRATORS AT PUDAHUEL, BUT SAID THAT, HAD THEY DONE SO, HE WOULD ORDER AN IMMEDIATE INVESTIGATION. BISHOP GONZALEZ' KIND WORDS ABOUT PINOCHET (PARA 4 ABOVE) LEFT OPEN THE POSSIBILITY OF AN UNDERSTANDING BEING REACHED ON THE AIRPORT INCIDENT. PINOCHET FOLLOWED UP WITH A LUNCHEON INVITATION AUGUST 18 TO THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE -- WHICH INCLUDES THE CARDINAL. A GOC STATEMENT ISSUED AFTERWARD SAID IT WAS CERTAIN THAT THE MEETING -- HELD IN "A CLIMATE OF FRANKNESS AND CORDIALITY" -- WOULD FURTHER "THE MAINTENANCE AND GUARANTEE OF GOOD RECIPROCAL RELATIONS." THE GOVERNMENT EXPRESSED, HOWEVER, ITS "INALTERABLE DETERMINATION TO CONTINUE EXERCISING ITS PREROGATIVES UNDER OUR JURIDICAL ORDER ... WITHOUT ALLOWING ANYONE TO INTERFERE...".

8. IN AN ATTEMPT TO INHIBIT FURTHER CRITICAL COMMENT, SANTIAGO MILITARY ZONE COMMANDER GENERAL ROLANDO GARAY AUGUST 18 PROCLAIMED A BAN ON ALL RADIO AND TELEVISION NEWS REPORTING ON THE CASTILLO/VELASCO EXPULSION AND THE PUDAHUEL INCIDENT. WE ASSUME THAT HIS TARGET WAS CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC AND CATHOLIC RADIO STATIONS, BUT IT CONFIDENTIAL

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ALSO CUT OFF NATIONAL TV, WHICH HAS BEEN THE SUBJECT OF CHURCH IRE. THE PRESS WAS NOT INCLUDED.

9. COMMENT: CHURCH LEADERS IN RECENT MONTHS HAVE BEEN WATCHING THE DEVELOPMENT OF GOC POLICY WITH INCREASING DISQUIET. CARDINAL SILVA HAS CONTINUED THE BASIC LINE OF RELYING ON HIS PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH PINOCHET TO ESPOUSE CHURCH CAUSES, RATHER THAN LETTING THE INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIP DETERIORATE INTO OPEN CONFLICT. BUT RELIGIOUS LEADERS HAVE FELT IMPOTENT TO INFLUENCE GOC ECONOMIC AND HUMAN RIGHTS POLICIES, AND -- AS SYMBOLIZED BY THEIR CRITICISM OF THE DOCTRINE THAT NATIONAL SECURITY FACTORS JUSTIFY REPRESSION IN LATIN AMERICA AND CHILE -- HAVE FELT INCREASINGLY UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT THE GOC'S LONG TERM GOALS. THE CONTINUING DETENTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER HERNAN MONTEALEGRE HAS BEEN A PARTICULARLY BITTER PILL FOR THEM.

10. THE RIGHTIST OR GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED MEDIA'S STRIDENT CRITICISM OF THE THREE BISHOPS, THE ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY CHURCH LEADERS WITH THE LEFT, THE UGLY AIRPORT DEMONSTRATION, AND THE REALIZATION THAT THE GOVERNMENT

HAD INSPIRED THE ASSAULT -- APPARENTLY COMBINED TO CAUSE
A HARSH REACTION FROM THE CHURCH, WHICH WENT BEYOND THE
IMMEDIATE EVENTS.

11. A WELL INFORMED CLERGYMAN TOLD US THERE WOULD BE NO
MORE CHURCH BOMBSHELLS. IF THE GOVERNMENT KEEPS QUIET,
THE WHOLE AFFAIRS MAY THUS DIE AWAY WITHOUT APPARENT CON-
SEQUENCES. WE CAN EXPECT, HOWEVER, THAT CHURCH RESENT-
MENT WILL LAST, AND THAT THE SPLIT WILL BE WIDENED
BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND SIGNIFICANT ELEMENTS OF THE
CHILEAN POPULATION FOR WHOM THE CHURCH MILITANT IS A
SPOKESMAN.
POPPER

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